

Jarosław Dąbrowski

**WRITINGS FROM THE
PARIS COMMUNE**



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From the translator

“The main reason for the sympathy felt by the working class for Poland is, however, this: Poland is not only the only Slav race which has fought and is fighting as a cosmopolitan soldier of the revolution. Poland spilt its blood in the American War of Independence; its legions fought under the banner of the first French republic; with its revolution of 1830 it prevented the invasion of France, which had been decided upon by the partitioners of Poland; in 1846 in Cracow it was the first to plant the banner of revolution in Europe, in 1848 it had a glorious share in the revolutionary struggles in Hungary, Germany and Italy; finally, in 1871 it provided the Paris Commune with the best generals and the most heroic soldiers.”

K. Marx, [*For Poland*](#), 1875

“The Commune admitted all foreigners to the honor of dying for an immortal cause. (...) Thiers, the bourgeoisie, the Second Empire, had continually deluded Poland by loud professions of sympathy, while in reality betraying her to, and doing the dirty work of, Russia. The Commune honored the heroic sons of Poland by placing them at the head of the defenders of Paris.”

K. Marx, [*The Civil War in France*](#), 1871

The following collection contains writings (proclamations, orders, correspondence) written by Jarosław Dąbrowski (November 13, 1836 – May 23, 1871), an outstanding Polish revolutionary-internationalist and hero of the Paris Commune.

Jarosław Dąbrowski (sometimes spelled: Dombrowski) was born on November 13, 1836 in Zhytomyr (in the Russian partition) into a Polish noble family. In 1845 he was sent to the Cadet Corps in Brest-Litovsk; in 1853 he was transferred to St. Petersburg. From 1856 to 1859 he served in the Russian Imperial Army fighting the Circassian insurgents (the least honorable chapter of his life). From 1859 to 1861 he studied at the General Staff Academy in St. Petersburg. It was there that he became involved in the anti-Tsarist revolutionary movement.

Dąbrowski played a prominent role in the Circle of Polish Officers in Saint Petersburg, which came in contact with Russian revolutionary-democratic movement around Nikolai Chernyshevsky and Alexander Herzen. In 1861 the Circle setup the Officer's Committee of the First Army – group of republican Polish and Russian officers stationed in the Russian partition – and Dąbrowski became its leader. In 1862 he was delegated to the Urban Committee, whose aim was to organize a Polish uprising. Soon after Dąbrowski joined the Urban Committee, it merged with the student-led Academic Committee to form the National Central Committee, which intensified preparations for the insurgency. Dąbrowski was one of the National Central Committee's main organizers and mastermind behind the military plan for what would become the January Uprising of 1863-4.

However he was arrested in late 1862 and didn't took part in the insurgency. In 1865 he escaped from Siberian exile and emigrated to France. There he took an active roll in émigré left. During the Franco-Prussian War he offered his help to successive governments: first, proposing starting an uprising in Poland to Napoleon III, then – forming a Polish guerrilla force to the Government of National Defense. He was rebuffed both times. He was arrested several times for illegally trying to leave Paris and join the fight against the Prussians. Finally, through the intercession of Giuseppe Garibaldi, he received government permission to organize the Polish Legion in Lyon as part of the Army of the Vosges. However, these plans were brutally thwarted by the capitulation. Devastated, Dąbrowski planned to withdraw from public life...

When the Paris Commune breaks out, Dąbrowski offers his services to the proletarian revolution. He becomes the commander of the 11th Legion of the National Guard, and on April 9, the City Commander.

Despite the hardships, despite the increasingly desperate situation, despite attempted assassinations and bribery, he demonstrated his dedication to the cause of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the universal revolution, until his heroic death on May 23, 1871. Thousands took part in his burial at Père Lachaise Cemetery.

Jarosław Dąbrowski became and remains a global symbol of internationalism and revolutionary self-sacrifice.

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This collection is divided into three parts:

- 1) proclamations, orders, official correspondence of Dąbrowski from the Commune period;
- 2) journalistic reports and interviews with Dąbrowski; they reflect Dąbrowski's state of mind and contain his sometimes harsh evaluation of Commune leadership, but they also reflect his unwavering devotion to the cause of freedom and internationalism;
- 3) correspondence of Dąbrowski's family, defending his memory and cause against slanderers.

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Translation from Polish based on: Dąbrowski J., *Listy*, ed.: Gerber R., Warsaw 1960, pp. 126-174.

Text in square brackets added by the translator.

All footnotes come from the translator unless otherwise noted.

Jarosław Dąbrowski

WRITINGS FROM THE PARIS COMMUNE

I

Proclamations, orders, official correspondence

To the Citizens of the 11th District

No. 30

Citizens!

At the request of citizen Avrial, a member of the Commune, I was appointed commander of the legion by the delegate of the Ministry of War.

I count on citizens' patriotism and help in my efforts to immediately reorganize the brave battalions of the 11th District on strong foundations.

I hope that these battalions will never cease to support the Commune of Paris, the center of the universal Republic.

General Commander the 11th Legion
J. Dąbrowski

City Headquarters to the Executive Commission and the Ministry of War

April 10, 1871

The troops finally settled in their positions in Asnieres. The armored train begins its operations and through its movements on the Versailles and Saint Germain lines protects the line between Colombes, Garennes and Courbevie. Our outposts at Villiers and Levallois have advanced and we occupy the entire north-eastern part of Neuilly.

With all my staff I scouted the section of Levallois, Villiers, Neuilly up to the intersection at the Boulevard du Roule and returned through the Porte des Ternes. The situation at Porte-Maillot improved greatly as the bombing weakened; during the night we were able to repair the damage caused by enemy fire and start building fortifications.

Throughout the night, complete order prevailed at our posts and rumors of the abandonment of various positions are invented by the reaction in order to demoralize the population.

City Commander
Dąbrowski.

To the Ministry of War and the Executive Commission

April 16, 1871

The offensive in Neuilly is advancing, we are occupying a new district, we have captured three barricades and, on one of them, the banner of the Papal Zouaves and the banners of the line infantry. The guards' morale is good. It is fulfilling its duty, making progress and showing a lot of enthusiasm.

Dąbrowski.

To the Executive Commission

Paris, April 19, 1871

After a bloody fight, we regained our positions. Our troops advanced on our left flank, captured an enemy food warehouse containing 69 barrels of ham, cheese and bacon.

Fierce fighting continues. The enemy artillery, positioned near Courbevoie, is bombarding us with shells and mitrailleuses, but despite the power of its fire, our right flank is now making a maneuver to surround the front units that are too far forward.

I need 5 battalions of fresh soldiers, at least 2,000 people, because the enemy forces are significant.

Dąbrowski.

To the Ministry of War and the Executive Commission

April 19, 1871

Today at dawn we were attacked by strong columns. Our vanguards, misled by false signals, collapsed, but I quickly resumed the battle; I have to have reinforcements though. It is essential to double the artillery. Send a company of sappers.

Dąbrowski.

**Telegraphic message from General J. Dąbrowski to the Ministry of War and the Executive
Commission, No. 175**

Sent on April 20, 1871 at 12:35

During the night the enemy took no action against us. He fired at us only with the fire of the batteries placed at Courbevoie and Mont Valerien. Our troops are strengthening their positions and resting after the great hardships of the day.

General J. Dąbrowski to the Ministry of War and the Executive Commission

No. 211

Neuilly, April 27, at 1:05 a.m.

Today at 7 a.m. our forward positions were violently attacked by enemy troops.

After fierce resistance, the 80th Battalion had to abandon the newly erected barricade; but the enemy, attacked from the side by the 74th Battalion, had to fall back and abandon the captured positions.

We are currently in control of all our positions. The enemy retreated along the entire line. Shelling ceased.

To the War Committee and the Committee of Public Safety

May 21, 1871

My predictions came true. The Versaillesans crossed the gate at St. Cloud at four o'clock. I gather my troops to attack. I hope to push them back with the people I have at the moment; send me reinforcements. This serious event should not frighten us. Let's keep our cool. Nothing is lost yet. If the Versaillesans hold on to this gate, we will blow them up and stop them in front of our second line of defense, leaning against the Auteuil Viaduct. Let us be calm – we cannot be defeated.

Dąbrowski.

To the Commanding General of the Imperial German Army

May 21, 1871

French Republic

Paris Commune

Headquarters

Command of the 1st Army

Mr. General.

Being seriously injured, I am turning to you, Mr. General, to politely ask whether, in case I am forced to leave Paris so as not to fall into the hands of the Versailles troops, I can count on your word and cross Saint Denis with my staff to go to Belgium. Counting on your kindness, Mr. General, please accept my thanks and expressions of deep respect.

Commander of the 1st Army
General Jarosław Dąbrowski.

II

Journalistic reports and interviews

Paris, April 17

... When I learned about Dąbrowski's appointment [as commandant of Paris], I didn't waste a minute and went to the commandant's headquarters on Place Vendôme. Here I found Dąbrowski.

I asked him if he had a moment of free time because I wanted to talk to him. I asked whether *it is politically wise for us Poles to interfere in the French civil war today?* – Dąbrowski replied more or less as follows: The Empire deceived us with promises and nothing more; the Government of National Defense and Trochu² did not want to hear about Poland; the commune raised the banner of the universal republic, and thus of the Polish cause – that is why I am in favor of the commune's policy, I accepted the office and I hope that with the army fighting for the universal republic I will defeat the monarchists of Versailles.

1 “Kraj” (“Country”) – a liberal daily newspaper published in Cracow from 1869 to 1874. The above article was published on April 26, 1871.

2 Louis-Jules Trochu (1815-1896) – French military leader and politician. He served during colonization of Algeria and Crimean War. During the Franco-Prussian War he served as military governor of Paris. In 1870, after Napoleon III was captured by the Prussians, he became the President of Government of National Defense. He resigned his governorship of Paris in January 1871, after the city capitulated. After February elections he became a deputy to the National Assembly. In July 1872 he retired from political life and in 1873 from the army.

Interview of the *Kraj* correspondent with Jarosław Dąbrowski

Paris, April 25

...During those days I met Dombrowski, rushing without any escort in a carriage through the boulevards to Place Vendôme. He was wearing the uniform of a general's guard, but his neck and part of his head were tied up quite tightly from his last wound. The signs of sympathy shown to him by those passing by were numerous. It is an undeniable truth that in the face of true merit, courage and ability, even the passions of the party *generally* disappear.

When he noticed me, he stopped and took me into the carriage with him. I took advantage of the time on the road, and here is the content of our conversation:

– I received a nomination – said Dombrowski – and an order to take command of the guard. Not accepting it meant becoming a suspect. Suspects are usually arrested, and those arrested are often shot. There was no choice. Anyway, that will show Trochu, who did not want to use me or my colleagues properly during the siege, asking wickedly *whether we had permission to do so from the Moscow embassy*, and also did not deign to let us go to Garibaldi and Bosak³, despite their complaints and who even ordered me to be arrested when I risked my life to break through the Prussian cordon to serve the cause which, although he killed it, he was still leading. Let Trochu see how he pushed away and alienated people who wanted nothing, no honors or rewards, except to fight in the name of freedom. And it seems that we now have evidence that we could have been useful.

– It would be a bad way of carrying out my duties to betray, I will not go to such wickedness, I do not want to imitate the French who occupy Versailles. Today the people want to defend their rights; to not help them when they call for me and I am able – that would be ignoble of me. Besides, my belief about the Paris Commune is that as soon as the moments of danger pass, as soon as it manages to win recognition of its rights, it will be one great step forward for progress.

3 Józef Hauke-Bosak (1834-1871) – Polish revolutionary. He took part in the January Uprising (1863-1864). As a military leader of insurgent forces in Lesser Poland he redistributed land to the peasants. After the fall of the uprising he emigrated. He fought on the French side during the Franco-Prussian War. He died on January 21, 1871, while fighting in the Army of Vosges (internationalist pro-republican volunteer unit under leadership of Giuseppe Garibaldi).

When I asked what his hopes were for the future of the struggle, he replied:

– The incompetence of the governmentalsists is great, their army is demoralized and disobedient, the lack of knowledge of the art of war among the former Napoleonic generals is astonishing. If they do not starve us, we will not yield.

– And the Prussians?

– It seems that they will finally intervene and crush us, but also finish off the governmentalsists in the eyes of all honest France. However, our blood will not go to waste in the progress of the idea.

– Is there no hope of reconciliation with Versailles?

– They will sooner come to terms with the Prussians to exterminate us, than extend their hand to us to defeat the Prussians together. (Just like in Poland.)

The conversation ended there as the carriage reached the Place Vendôme. However, it sufficiently reflects the character and current position of this man.

Conversation between Bronisław Wołowski⁴ and Jarosław Dąbrowski

[May 7, 1871]

Having arrived at Place Vendôme, where Dąbrowski's main headquarters were located, I found him mounting his horse: If you want to talk to me, please go with me to Neuilly, we will have time to talk on the way.

We set off, I in the carriage to which he ordered me into, he on his horse, surrounded by an escort of six men. Leaving behind the Arc de Triomphe, on the Champs Élysées, we were already exposed to the danger – missiles fell on both sides of the road, tearing here and there a cornice from a house, piercing closed shutters to cause unknown damage to the interior of the house. The inhabitants had either completely left this part of the city or were waiting in the basements for the end of the fratricidal massacre that the Versailles government was carrying out with such ferocity against the capital.

I involuntarily recalled the protests of Mr. Julius Favre⁵, shouting to the whole of Europe, against the barbarity of the Prussians, about the bombing of Paris, “this capital of the civilized world, the seat of the most powerful arts and sciences” and, looking at the bombs exploding from time to time far away from us, I was deeply thinking about the perversity of humankind.

Dąbrowski brought me out of this reverie.

D. – Look, Mr. Bronisław, there is a bomb three steps away from us: maybe I invited you here for a chat so that we both don't come back? As for me, they [bombs] don't want me; I go into the greatest fire, I expose myself, and the more I mock them, the more they respect me. So we'll be fine this time, unless you have some evil talisman on you.

W. – Mr. Picard's pass?⁶

4 Bronisław Wołowski – Polish patriotic activist and prolific journalist.

5 Jules Favre (1809-1880) – French Republican politician. During the Second Empire he belonged to the anti-Bonapartist opposition. After the fall of the monarchy, he served as Vice-President and Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Government of National Defense; he kept the latter post under Thiers' administration. He resigned on August 2, 1871 after signing the humiliating peace treaty with Prussia. During the Third Republic he served first as a deputy and then as a senator (since 1876) for the so-called Opportunist Republicans.

D. – Well, don't worry, a piece of a missile won't hurt its master's signature.

And that's what really happened, the bomb exploded, many fragments flew over our heads, not a single Dąbrowski's comrade was touched.

D. – You see, we have a holiday here every day.

W. – Send your escort forward a little and let's talk: Versailles wants to bribe you.

D. – My wife and I have had enough of emissaries of all sorts here. Judging by the persistence with which Mr. Thiers tries to get rid of me – because there have been attacks on me – I see that our cause in Paris is pretty strong. Except I have such bastard officers that it makes me angry that I found something similarly stupid in Paris, in the supposed capital of the world. There are many respectable people among them, but they have not the slightest idea about the military. As for Versailles, come to my place today around 11 p.m. on Place Vendôme, you will see the Frenchman who has undertaken this beautiful mission. They are shouting at the Commune in Versailles, saying that they are scoundrels and robbers, but you can see for yourself how they are here. No one even asked you for your passport when entering the city. They say that these are scum of society, but what about people who, in the name of law and justice, attack us here and want to kill us, and resort to vile means of bribery and want to continue the war with a bag of gold, that's already so needed for the Prussians. If you prove to me that these are fair means, I will immediately leave the Commune and go to serve Versailles. Well? – after a short while Dąbrowski asked me.

I bowed my head in agreement, because what was there to answer to such strict logic?

D. – So you see, I'm not as black as they make me out to be. You know that I wanted to withdraw from public life already in Lyon – fate forced me to return to Paris. The unanimity that existed there in condemning Versailles induced me to accept the command. Let there be whatever people they say among the members of the Commune – it is not about people here, but about the point. If I had

6 Ernest Picard (1821-1877) – French politician. He was an anti-Bonapartist republican during the Second Empire. After the fall of the monarchy, he became Minister of Finance in the Government of National Defense. Later he served as Minister of Interior in Thiers' cabinet. During the Third Republic he was an Opportunist Republican parliamentarian.

served in Napoleon's army, and he was a great criminal, and I had accepted the rank of general, I would have been hailed in Poland as a great man. People fall into monomania, everything in this world is fashionable, no one investigates things. I don't read newspapers because I don't have time, but I know they are doing hatchet jobs on me. If I were ambitious, I would have gone not to the Commune, but to Versailles. I would accept the humblest rank, and they would soon raise me. To those who beat the Prussians during Gambetta's⁷ times, who were heroes, they refuse everything, they bargain with them for ranks won on the battlefield, in danger, while risking lives, and to those who slaughter their own brothers they give crosses and promotions, call them heroes. I'll tell you honestly, it makes me sick when I see the stubbornness between both sides when the agreement was so easy! Versailles is incomparably more guilty, because Thiers the old fox and the *assemblée nationale* know what they are doing. You'd have to be blind not to see it. Here you will satisfy everyone with words alone: When they call me to a war council here in Paris, they ask me nothing more than my word, whether it is possible to win? When I tell them yes, they no longer have the patience to listen to me to find out what means they need to use to achieve this victory. Strain and break your head, what's that to them? And if you make the slightest remark that could indicate danger, you will be accused of treason. The fact that I am a Pole is a disadvantage to me, because I cannot order cowards to be shot in the head. I am giving them away to court martial, I am sending them – those who escaped from the battlefield and in words were heroes the likes of which the world has never seen – to Cherche-midi prison. And so what? Each of them has an acquaintance or friend in the Commune, in the club he talked as if he had the power to turn the whole world upside down, and when I am sure that I have purged my ranks, they release him and make excuses and reprimand me for having such a good patriot arrested.

W. – Why don't you resign?

D. – Well, I gave my resignation, but every time I do, they don't accept it and promise to fulfill even my greatest whims, even my greatest injustices. And that's where it ends, Finally, if I had left them, imagine what would have happened? Their practicality or military knowledge isn't worth three

⁷ Léon Gambetta (1838-1882) - French petty bourgeois-republican politician. During the Second Empire, a member of the parliamentary republican opposition. After the defeat at Sedan, he proclaimed the establishment of the Republic on September 4, 1870, calling for *levée en masse*. He served as Minister of Interior in the Government of National Defense. After the peace treaty with Prussia, he resigned and temporarily withdrew from political life. During the Paris Commune he did not comment on it, but slandered it in private correspondence. He returned to public life in mid-1871. He founded and led the Republican Union (*Union républicaine*). He was the leading figure of bourgeois republicanism in the Third Republic. In the years 1879–81 he was the chairman of the Chamber of Deputies, in the years 1881–82 he was the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs.

cents. Only Rossel⁸ is solely capable. But no matter how much he and I give orders, we are sure that they are never carried out properly, and not because of ill will, but because of ignorance, misunderstanding. You have to be everywhere yourself, so I'm on a horse both day and night. Rossel took away the supreme command that the Commune gave me after Cluseret's⁹ arrest and wants to direct military operations himself. Hence new and unnecessary chaos arises. As a Pole, I have to endure all this.

You know it well that if I win, things will take a completely different turn in France. Knowing from experience that here you have to strike while the iron is hot and that the French easily fall from one extreme to another and easily turn into heroes out of peace cowards, I will go with them against the Prussians. The same people who call us robbers will fawn over us. The Commune and I will become great people, because we will have in our hands the power that allowed Bismarck to become a great politician. Power above law, Misters Thiers and Favre only bow to this. So far, Polish politicians have always sought help from other gods and always bowed to someone. Today I found an opportunity, rare for a Pole, to be everything on my own, to have others at my fingertips, so when asked, I accepted.

When you see Mr. Picard, you can tell him for me that they are mocking Poland, they do not count on alliance with it, they think that we are no longer alive. Well, one Pole has been keeping them in check for two months. What would it be like if they turned the entire Polish nation against them? Whether I will succeed, I don't know; the only certainty is that I cannot be considered a madman, because the revolution that is taking place at this moment is taking place not in Bucharest or even in Madrid, but in Paris. We have everything we need to wage war, but we lack the spirit. But the battalions under fire quickly turn into soldiers. Only their organization is very lopsided, otherwise the people of Versailles would be singing a different tune. Can you believe which battalions are the

8 Louis -Nathaniel Rossel (1844-1871) – French military officer. Took part in the Commune and served as its Minister of War from May 1 to May 9. After the fall of the Commune, he fled Paris, but was apprehended shortly thereafter. He was executed on November 28, 1871.

9 Gustave Paul Cluseret (1823-1900) – French military officer. In 1848 he participated as a National Guard leader in suppressing the June Rebellion. Afterwards he became an anti-Bonapartist. In 1850s he served in Algeria and during the Crimean War. He resigned from the military in 1858. In 1860 organized the De Flotte Legion (volunteer unit fighting on the side of Italian patriots) in Italy. From 1861 to 1863 in the Union Army during the American Civil War. In 1867 he took part in the Fenian Rising in Ireland. In the late 1860s he probably joined the First International. In early 1871 he unsuccessfully tried to spark popular revolts in Lyon and Marseilles. After learning of the Uprising of March 18, he went to Paris. He served as Commune's Minister of War. Because of tensions with Commune's leadership and incompetence he was arrested on May 1st under suspicion of treason. On May 21 he was acquitted. After the fall of the Commune he went into exile. In 1880 he returned to France. In 1888, 1889, 1893 and 1898 he was elected as a socialist deputy of Toulon. In 1890s he began moving right – in 1893 he left the International and in 1894 he became an anti-Dreyfusard

most crazy about me? Those that I led under the fire more than a dozen days ago and half of which remained on the square, either dead or wounded. The other half would die for me and would follow me even into hell. With them I also resist the ten times stronger number of Versaillesans. You will see for yourself how few men I have in Neuilly, and yet the Versaillesans do not dare to advance. (Dąbrowski had 1,800 men against 24,000 Versaillesans. Mr. Picard told me that Dąbrowski had 40,000 troops in Neuilly). It's true that I always have to pay for it with my own person, but I'm slowly making something out of them.

Who would have thought that one day a Pole would teach patriotism and sacrifice to the French? It's good to try everything in this world. There is great dissatisfaction with the Chamber of Versailles in the provinces. The agents of the Commune lie often, it is true, like mad, but there is one truth undeniable in their reports, that our first military success against the Versailles would give rise to a general explosion in all the cities.

You can't stop French people once they're rise up. Someone give them a speech that the Prussian must be slaughtered, that it's silly to put it off until tomorrow, and they will go, every one of them. They will scream like crazy: à Berlin! à Berlin! And who knows if this time this song will end like at Sedan? As for me, I will do my duty, and if I don't win, at least they will give me a lavish funeral here.

W. – All this is fine and I would agree with it, but this general apathy, this indifference frighten me! Such an important revolution is a *fait accompli*, the civil war is in full force, and all over France, when you go to a coffee shop, you meet French people playing cards, chess, dominoes, billiards, or going to the theater! You will die, Mr. Jarosław, without any benefit, both for yourself and, most importantly, for our cause. They will take revenge on Poland and the Versailles government is dragging us through the mud.

D. – First of all, don't imitate the French and don't exaggerate. I did not go on behalf of Poland, but only as a simple nobody, as Dąbrowski. I am allowed to be even a Don Quixote, if I like it. Here, I am especially not one because I have something to risk. That a handful of mercenaries will scream – let them scream until they get paid for something new. Every impartial person will distinguish, even if there was evil in my actions, the country and émigrés [in general] from a single individual. Moreover, I am not afraid of the judgment of the future; the hour will come when justice will be

done to me as well. So far I know more about prison bars than fresh air. I gave my word and I prefer to act today while there is energy; I'm so worn out now that after the war I'll be like an old rag unfit to wipe kitchen pots.

W. – And do you know, Mr. Jarosław, that I am here in Paris with the Versailles government's knowledge? They asked me to propose that you hand over the gates of Paris to Versailles and arrest the members of the Commune, for a fee the price of which you can determine yourself. They won't bargain with you. Of course, I refused.

D. – Thank you for both of us. You would put me in an unpleasant spot of having to arrest you like Byszyński¹⁰, who took on this role unworthy of a Pole and is still imprisoned in Cherche-midi. But let's talk about something else. What do they say in our Polish newspapers?

10 Byszyński – a Versailles spy who tried to bribe Dąbrowski. Not much is known about him.

To Bronisław Wołowski

Commune de Paris
Général commandant en chef
Republique Francaise

Headquarters in Neuilly, May 9, 1871

My Dear Bronisław,

Man and fate have different designs. I couldn't show up for the meeting I scheduled for you today because duty calls me to the front guard.

Because you decided to leave Paris before the evening, I am enclosing here a permanent pass so that you can see me in the future. At the same time, I feel obliged to say that the conversation with you made a great impression on me and that I will be happy to return to this conversations with you.

Sincerely devoted,
J. Dąbrowski

The second conversation between Bronisław Wołowski and Jarosław Dąbrowski

On May 12, I arrived again in Paris.

– Well, are they angry with me in Versailles? – Dąbrowski greeted me.

W. – So angry that if you wanted, you could go abroad with this pass. They will love you, but from afar.

Dąbrowski took the pass from my hand, read it and, handing it back, pointed to the handle of his broadsword: “Here is my pass, you can tell that to Mr. Picard, Thiers and all his mamluks from the Assemblée Nationale”.

W. – Very well, but between us – and between us only – how do things stand? Tell me honestly, Mr. Jarosław, isn't your faith faltering? The chaos I see here, the small number of people fighting – all this gives me no comfort. I have a feeling you're going to leave your head here.

D. – That would be nothing, if it was worth it. But I'm really starting to realize that I don't know what they're fighting for anymore? Few people fulfill their duties as they should. The last three days have healed me of my faith. I sent my wife and children to London, and as for me, it is done. I have to die because I can't think of any settlement. There are blind people in the Commune and mean people in the Versailles. When they feel they have the upper hand over us, they will go to extreme lengths. I always told you that Thiers is both an infamis and a fox.

W. – So why don't you resign?

D. – I would have plenty of excuses, but since all of Paris knows that I was offered 1.5 million just for my resignation, they would say that I was a traitor. I will not leave this stain in legacy to my children. Has it not already been said that I am a cheat, a spy, a criminal? Even though I know that my death will not disarm them, I will lay my head here. My wife and children will escape their persecution – never mind me.

– It's a real shame that the Commune wasted everything so much. There was no order or structure in anything. I feel sorry for them, because among them there are many dedicated people, but their practical sense isn't worth two cents. They make enemies, as if on purpose, with epigrams, they play at overturning monuments. They decree and decree instead of forming battalions for me. Delescluze¹¹, a brave man, but so what, when he's so unprofessional. He works like an ox. I repay him for the trust he places in me. It's a pity that France doesn't have more such patriots.

W. – All this confirms my belief that you should withdraw!

D. – That's impossible. I would never use their passes, even if I wanted to escape. And they're too stupid to catch me.

11 Louis Charles Delescluze (1809-1871) – French revolutionary. He took part in the July Revolution as a republican. He was active in left republican associations during the July Monarchy. After 1848 he moved toward socialism. In 1860 he joined the First International. On March 26, 1871 he was elected into the Paris Commune. He was active in many of the most important revolutionary committees: the Foreign Relations Committee, the Executive Commission, the Committee of Public Safety and since May 11 he was civilian delegate to the Ministry of War. On May 25 at 7:30 p.m. he was shot at the top of a barricade.

APPENDICES

Correspondence of the Dąbrowski family

[1871]

Sir!

In your last speech to the Versailles Assembly, you accused my husband several times of playing the role of a Prussian spy during the siege of Paris. The only evidence you gave to support your accusation was the order you gave to arrest him as a spy. There are still honest people for whom this type of proof will always be insufficient. In order to convince them, it was Your duty to add that before General Dąbrowski was arrested by the French outposts, despite having a pass issued by your own government, he had asked you for permission to fight for France in the Paris army. You should also have said that before attempting to break through the Prussian ranks to join General Garibaldi, who asked him to take his place in his army, my husband tried, in his speeches and in the pamphlet – which you never forgave him for writing – turn the defense of Paris into something higher than a bloody comedy.

Your audience at the National Assembly could recall that the absurd and vile accusation leveled by the moribund empire against the very people who later took advantage of it managed, within two months, to demoralize the public conscience and make almost irreparable the first defeats suffered by France. We should also not forget, General, that people like You hate people like Dąbrowski.

For the sake of Your party, if not of an unworthy personal offense, You did not hesitate to hurt the widow's heart, You tried to stain the memory of the deceased, You wanted to dishonor his poor children, who will not be able to demand compensation for Your slander for a long time.

I demand, General, that You justify Your accusation and base it, if not on evidence, then at least on inferences, and this is the motive that prompted General Dąbrowski's widow, currently the only guardian of his children, to draw attention to the slander that hurts her, and offends in her most ardent feelings as a mother, wife and patriot.

12 Pelagia Dąbrowska née Zgliczyńska (1843-1909) – Polish political activist, wife of Jarosław. Before the January Uprising, she was a courier in the revolutionary-independence underground. Arrested in May 1864 and exiled to Siberia. In 1865, she escaped with Jarosław and emigrated to France. She took an active part in the Paris Commune. She left Paris with her children at the beginning of May 1871 on Dąbrowski's orders and emigrated to London. In 1872 she emigrated to Dresden, and in 1880 she moved to Cracow. There she worked as a teacher until the end of her life.

Teofil Dąbrowski¹³ to Józef Ignacy Kraszewski¹⁴

London, October 20, 1871

14, Barnsbury St. Islington

Dear Sir!

You may be surprised that even though I hardly know You, I dare to write to You. It would undoubtedly be ridiculous on my part, if it were not for Your unique position in relation to humanity and Poland, as an excellent writer that the country is proud of, and as a politically savvy man. Firstly, You are known to everyone who can read. Secondly, to all those who, following the impulse of their heart and duty, took part in the uprising of '64 and then in the political activities of the insurrection. My brother Jarosław was undoubtedly among the number of tireless workers for the liberation of Poland. I know from him that he knew You personally and although You may not have had the same political principles, he always counted You among the people of progressive political beliefs and had great respect for You. The Paris Revolution of March 18, and especially its unfortunate end, put us in a rather sensitive position towards the country. They accuse us that by taking part in the defense of the Paris Commune we have discredited the country towards Europe (?), that we were the perpetrators of robberies, rapes and arson – not wanting to acknowledge that by taking part in it, we were defending an idea that is undoubtedly great because it is based on truth. The uprising collapses, the fighting ends. Thirty thousand people murdered by a summary court of drunken soldiers on the cobblestones of Paris cannot, however, kill or silence the idea – because it is right, so it endures and must triumph; and the best proof is that *today more than ever the struggle between labor and capital is the order of the day*. A social revolution in Europe is almost inevitable. Not today, then tomorrow, not next year, then in a few years. Therefore, when we took part in the Paris movement, we knew exactly what we were doing. As people with the same political beliefs as those expressed by the Commune, we had a duty to conscientiously defend these principles. But this time it wasn't just about defending our beliefs – it was about something more. We, as Poles, have always viewed all political and social issues from a Polish point of view. Our first thought and

13 Teofil Dąbrowski (1842-after 1890) – Polish revolutionary, brother of Jarosław. He took an active part in the January Uprising. After its fall, he emigrated to France. During the Paris Commune he was a military commander. After the fall of the Commune, he emigrated to London. There he was active in the First International and the socialist Union of the Polish People (*Związek Ludu Polskiego*).

14 Józef Ignacy Kraszewski (1812-1887) – a prolific Polish writer, social activist and philanthropist. During the January Uprising, he sympathized with the moderate “White” faction.

question was always: what benefit could this bring to Poland? Well, when we joined the Paris Revolution, we saw it as a social revolution which, if successful, could overturn the entire state of affairs existing in Europe today. Could Poland have anything to lose from this? Nothing. To win? Everything. This thought was a spur for all Poles fighting under the revolutionary banner. This thought gave us a double value compared to everything that surrounded us. And that is why it is incomprehensible to many why we outweighed in courage and dedication all others taking part in this matter. I do not deny that the outcome of the struggle was sad, but these are the usual consequences of a civil war, in which the inflammation of the political passions of both sides is carried to the highest degree. We took no part in this massacre. When fighting against the army of Versailles, we fought with a certain pain in our hearts, because from childhood we were accustomed to consider the French as something closer to us than people of other nationalities. This disposition towards France is undoubtedly mistaken. It leads to us always looking back at it and always being disappointed in our hopes. France cannot do anything for us. And that is why we should once and for all become convinced that we should only think about ourselves. Today, there are two paths left for us – to break free on our own; without or with the help of a social revolution. However, these two issues are closely related. Fighting with one's own strength can only be effective in certain exceptional circumstances, and the best of these is a social revolution. That's why it seems to me today, just as it seemed to us before, that the political path for Poland is simple and clearly marked – internal work on developing its own strength and external work: monitoring the progress of the social revolution so that, when the situation arises, we won't be utilized by it, but we'll utilize it.

Forgive me, Dear Sir, for writing so extensively on this matter and for taking up Your time, which is so precious to You, but I wanted to prove, albeit weakly, that when we took part in the Paris Revolution, our only thought was the good and benefit that could flow from it for Poland — to prove that we were not simple condottieri, serving for profit or just to fight. Conscientious belief in fulfilled duty needs no reward; but it's sad to hear condemnation when you don't deserve it...

... I take this opportunity to express the deep respect with which I remain a servant.

T. Dombrowski.

[My] sister-in-law sends her regards to the Dear Sir.

London, September 17, 1872

Gazeta Narodowa, no. 246 from September 8 this year quotes a passage from a letter from Paris to *Dziennik Poznański*, in which the Paris correspondent makes accusations against the memory of my brother Jarosław and in general against Poles who took part in the Paris Commune.

1) Apparently the colonel of the Commune, Henry, declared in London that it was he who shot my brother, having learned that, in agreement with the Versaillesans, he had not manned the Point du Jour gate, which made it easier for them to enter Paris.

2) That Admiral Saisset¹⁶ testified before the commission, confirming this statement about my brother's agreement with the Versaillesans.

As for the first one; it is known to everyone from the Versailles newspapers that this gate was given up by the 13th and 113th Battalions of the National Guard, that the officer who announced the lowering of the gate was called Ducatel, and that for this he was decorated with the Cross of the Legion of Honor.

When the Versaillesans entered, my brother was in the Ministry of War, summoned to a war council. From the moment of Versaillesans' entry until the death of my brother, I hardly left him for a moment, because, due to weakness, being replaced by someone else in the command I had at Asnieres, I remained for several days on the Place Vendôme. Feeling better that day, I accompanied my brother back to Passy, where the news of the arrival of the Versaillesans surprised us unexpectedly. It was around 4 p.m. on Sunday, May 21. My brother, informing the Ministry of War of the entry of the Versaillesans and demanding the fastest possible help in men and artillery, decided to attack them immediately. So, having gathered the forces at his disposal (about a thousand men), he divided them into two columns, commanding one himself, and entrusting me with command of

15 "Gazeta Narodowa" ("The National Newspaper") – liberal daily newspaper published in Lviv (then in Austria-Hungary) from 1862 to 1915. This letter was published in issue no. 266 from September 24, 1872.

16 Jean-Marie Saisset (1810-1879) – French military officer and politician. He took part in defense of Paris during the Franco-Prussian War. From March 19 to 23, 1871 he acted as a mediator between the Communards and the National Assembly. After his effort failed, he supported Thiers' government as a member of the National Assembly. He withdrew from military service in 1875 and from politics in 1876.

the other. We were to attack from two sides, I along the trenches, and my brother was to go around and attack from the rear, from the side of the railway bridge. But fighting in vain with the Versaillesans until 7 o'clock I waited for the agreed signal to attack them with bayonets. There was no signal and only around 8 o'clock I learned that my brother, seriously injured to the chest by a bomb fragment, was lying almost unconscious in the headquarters. When I arrived at the headquarters, I found my brother very weak, constantly dizzy, but he nevertheless gave orders to his officers to occupy a new defensive line from the Grenelle Bridge to the Chateau de la Muette. In this way, he wanted to cut off the Versaillesans from the rest of Paris, and, sticking to the system of barricades that defended the village of Neuilly, sell every inch of land at a high price. I must add here that my brother had previously intended to leave this part of Passy and Auteuil and retreat beyond the crossfire of the batteries of Issa and Mont-Valerien, because this part was bombarded by the batteries: Montre-tout de Breteuil, des Quarte. Tourelles, Issy, Meudon and Mont-Valerien. More than 400 large-caliber cannons pounded this point relentlessly, making the position almost untenable.

Meanwhile, instead of reinforcements, couriers were sent from the Ministry of War from time to time to let them know how things were going. Entire battalions of the National Guard, instead of taking their assigned positions, retreated towards Paris. The barricade of the Grenelle Bridge was abandoned, thus opening the route of the Versaillesans along all the way to Trocadero. At 2 a.m. on Monday they were masters of this position. There was no other way, we had to retreat with several hundred other people to the Place de la Concorde. From here [my] brother went to the Hôtel de Ville¹⁷, where he presented the entire state of affairs to the gathered members of the Commune, asking to be replaced in command due to his health, at least for a while, by someone else. Colonel Farry was appointed his deputy. So, having handed over command around 8 a.m., he went to Place Vendôme. But it was difficult to find rest there – because of the batteries of the Versaillesans positioned on the Trocadero, which at 9 a.m. started throwing grenades at the Tuillerie and Place Vendôme, and he was even more disturbed by the officers who were constantly coming for orders. I suggested going to St. Quen. This village, although occupied by the National Guard, was a neutral point between the Prussians, the Versaillesans and the Commune. Around 4 p.m., the National Guard, under attack in Neuilly and Clichy, withdrew to St. Quen. Colonel Veillaut, my deputy, having learned that we had been in St. Quen since the morning, spread a rumor that we wanted to flee to the Prussians and that he had orders to arrest us. The National Guard began to demand that we all

¹⁷ City Hall.

return to Paris together. There was no choice, escorted by her around 9 p.m., we returned to Hôtel de Ville, where we were welcomed with joy. We were immediately taken to a meeting of the Salut Public Committee, whose members were surprised to hear about our arrest, as no one had issued a similar order. Lieutenant Colonel Veillaut, arrested for arbitrary actions and sentenced to death by a court martial, was shot the next morning after [my] brother's death, in the town hall of the 11th district.

On Tuesday, my brother was summoned in the morning to the Salut Public Committee, where, upon urgent request, he accepted defense of the 19th and 20th districts. I immediately received an order from him to take all the volunteers from the barracks around the Hôtel de Ville and lead them to the Strasbourg Hill. I found only two companies of the children of Paris and with them I went to the indicated place. Soon, my brother arrived at the head of a company of sailors. We were about to move when an officer reported a skirmish near Chateau Rouge and La Chapelle. My brother gave me orders to go to La Chapelle and take command there, while he himself, taking a company of sailors, went towards Chateau Rouge to help. At 4 p.m. we were to meet at the town hall of the 20th district, where the headquarters were located. Alas! When we parted, we didn't know that we were parting for the last time. Half an hour later, my brother was hit by a bullet below the chest while walking at the head of the sailors to recapture a barricade occupied by the Versaillesans at the corner of the Rue Myrra and the Ornano Boulevard. Transferred to the Bariboisie hospital, he stopped living within three quarters of an hour. I learned about my brother's death two hours later. I found him already at Hôtel-de Ville, where his body had been transferred. From the time of our parting until his death, his orderly officer, Lieutenant E. Borniewski, was still with him, in addition to several Polish cavalymen who served as his escort. I describe these facts to prove the absurdity of rumors spread by the Versaillesans that my brother was killed by his own soldiers or by some Commune officer. The true grief and sadness etched on all faces after my brother's death proved to me then and proves today that no one even suspected that the entry of the Versaillesans was His fault.

Therefore, the rumor of Colonel Henry's statement is completely false and has no basis in fact. Moreover, if there had existed even a shadow of suspicion against my brother, I had been living in London for a year and would probably not have been spared by the French émigrés of the Commune, who don't spare themselves. They all pay tribute to the memory of my brother. They

value His courage and dedication to the cause for which he fought, and his name is remembered with respect.

As for Admiral Saisset's testimony, already in March of this year it was repeated by almost all French and a few English dailies. Admiral Saisset was to testify before the commission that my brother had made "good faith" arrangements with him for the surrender of Paris¹⁸.

It was my duty to explain the falsity of this testimony, but although I was completely familiar with the entire course of the case, I thought that my testimony as a brother would [not] be sufficient. I therefore went to the men who held the most important positions in the Paris Commune, who were well acquainted with the whole matter, and whose testimony is of full value in explaining it.

A few days later, i.e. on March 13 this year, Vermersch's¹⁹ *Journal* – an émigré organ published in London – printed three letters explaining this matter and signed by Ranvier²⁰ and Ch. Gerardin, members of the Commune and the Salut Public Committee, and A. Dupont²¹, member of the Commune and head of the Committee of Public Safety.

In these letters they openly and clearly state: that my brother, immediately after the offer was made by the Versaillesans to hand over the gates of Paris for the sum of one million five hundred thousand francs (1,500,000), went to the Salut Public Committee and presented the whole thing. That only on a clear order from this Committee he was to continue the negotiations, and that to monitor this matter, one of the secretaries of the head of the Committee of Public Safety was added to my brother's side as an adjutant. The idea was to take advantage of the Versailles offer and, having led

18 This newspaper expressed disbelief when reporting this rumor from the correspondent of *Dziennik Poznański* [Note from the editorial staff of *Gazeta Narodowa*].

19 Eugène Vermersch (1845-1878) – French poet and radical journalist. During the Commune he was the editor-in-chief of *Le Pere Duchene*. After the fall of the Commune he emigrated. He joined the First International. He spend most of his exile feuding with other ex-Communards, at least partly as a result of his declining mental health ("paranoid dementia"). He died in a London mental asylum. Given his combative personality and paranoia, it is noteworthy that Vermersch's paper defended Dąbrowski's good name.

20 Gabriel Ranvier (1828-1879) – French revolutionary activist, Blanquist. He took part in defense of Paris during the Franco-Prussian War; on September 4, 1870 he was elected commander of the 141st Battalion of the National Guard. He took part in failed uprising of October 31, 1870. As a member of the Central Committee of the National Guard he took part in the March 18 Uprising. On March 26 he was elected to the Commune. After the fall of the Commune he emigrated to London. [Ranvier's letter is part of this selection.](#)

21 Clovis Dupont (1830-1908) – French revolutionary. He was elected to the Central Committee of the National Guard on March 10, 1871. He took part in the March 18 Uprising and was elected to the Commune. After the fall of the Commune he was condemned to hard labor in New Caledonia. He returned to France in 1880 after amnesty.

them into an ambush, inflict a defeat on them, if not decisive, then at least very severe one. Circumstances did not allow this plan to be carried out.

These letters are irrefutable proof that Admiral Saisset is wrong in his testimony, claiming that my brother concluded the agreements for the surrender of Paris “in good faith”.

The Versaillesans never stopped making similar offers to my brother, not to hand over the gates of Paris, but to resign. They were all rejected by him with contempt.

Such proposals were made not only to my brother, but also to Poles in general who held more important positions, and were similarly judged by everyone.

When we took part in the Commune, we knew why and what we were going to fight for. We were not concerned only with winning a commune government for Paris, but with the victory of the social revolution, which seems to me to be of some concern to us. Therefore, those who argue that we have interfered, against the Poles' sense of dignity, in the alien and dirty matters of the Paris rebellion, are wrong.

A Pole's sense of dignity is this: wherever he sees a ray of hope for Poland's salvation, he should try to utilize it selflessly.

Who could have predicted that this rebellion had resources that no revolution had ever had before: two hundred thousand armed soldiers, eight hundred cannons, huge stocks of ammunition that could have been enough to wage war for several years, and over two billion in cash lying in the bank (not counting other capitals belonging to various funds); who could have predicted that with such means, due to the great incompetence of the people leading it, the revolution would end so sadly after two months!

By taking part in the Commune, we did not act as representatives of our nationality, but as isolated individuals for whom Poland *cannot and is not* responsible before the world.

We knew well that in case of failure, all the thunder would fall on our heads – but only on ours. On the contrary, if we were successful, with a general movement, having important military positions,

we could be useful to our cause. Besides, it seems to me that by fighting in the ranks of the Commune, we did not harm Polish honor in any way. No accusation can be placed against us. Neither of personal prospects of enrichment nor of participation in the atrocities that were unfortunately committed on both sides²². We fought as soldiers. Unceasingly behind the trenches of Paris. Day and night on the vanguard, collapsing under the weight of fatigue and discomfort – we set an example of sacrifice and perseverance to the French. With the entry of the Versaillesans, or rather with the death of my brother, I've tendered my resignation and received it. As for other Poles who were in the Commune, they behaved completely passively, not getting involved in anything. The accusation made by the Versaillesans against General Wróblewski²³, that he ordered the shooting of the Dominicans, is completely false.

I know for sure that he never gave such an order. Indeed, when he learned that they were to be shot, he himself went to the place to stop the execution, but, being busy setting up batteries on Buteaux Cailles, he arrived too late. “You have to be vile to kill defenseless people (Il faut etre lache de tuer les gens sans armes)” – said Wróblewski in front of the battalion performing the shooting. These words are the best proof of how he viewed an execution of a similar type. We shared his opinion completely. Besides, these kinds of matters were not ours at all; that was what prosecutors and special commissars were for.

In defense of the memory of my brother and of Poles in general who were in the Commune, I tried to describe as faithfully and conscientiously as possible the entire series of events that took place in order to inform public opinion of the truth and thus prevent false news from being spread by our enemies or people of ill will.

Concluding my letter, I hope that you will, Dear Citizen Editor, give it a place in the columns of Your newspaper.

22 It's important to keep in mind the scale of “atrocities that were unfortunately committed on both sides”. Not counting combat deaths: the revolutionaries were responsible for less than 100 deaths (2 officers lynched on March 18 and dozens of hostages shot during the “Bloody Week”); the number of victims of counterrevolution during the “Bloody Week” goes into tens of thousands (mostly prisoners of war and civilians).

23 Walery Wróblewski (1836-1908) – Polish revolutionary. He took part in the January Uprising as part of its radical “Red” faction. After the fall of the uprising he emigrated to France. During the Franco-Prussian War he defended besieged Paris in the National Guard. Took prominent part in the Paris Commune. After the fall of the Commune, he emigrated, first to Belgium, then to London. In London he became an active member of the First International; he met and befriended Marx and Engels. In 1877 he organized a Polish legion in Geneva, which fought against Russia in the Russo-Turkish War. After amnesty, in 1881, he returned to France. In 1895 he joined the Foreign Union of Polish Socialists (since 1900 – Foreign Section of the PPS). He was buried in Père Lachaise Cemetery.

I remain respectfully, sharing a fraternal greeting.

Teofil Dąbrowski

Gabriel Ranvier to Teofil Dąbrowski

London, March 10, 1872

St. John st. 160

Dear Citizen!

It is with great pleasure that I turn to You to speak out against the false testimony given by Mr. Saisset regarding Your brother who died in the struggle for the Commune.

It is necessary to know, as we do, what happened in Paris and how Your brother died from Versailles's bullets on Tuesday, May 23, in order to force Mr. Saisset into silence.

Therefore, it is false that the death of some traitor, shot on Wednesday, took place on Dąbrowski's order.

It's true that Versailles offered Your brother to enter into an agreement. However, [Your] brother informed us immediately about this, and from that moment on he was very much concerned with the military advantages he could obtain from our enemies by making use of their proposals.

I declare that Dąbrowski's conduct was honorable until the end and that he died with his typical, well-known courage.

May these few lines erase the insult caused by Mr. Saisset's accusation to the memory of him who had lived so valiantly.

Please, accept...

Former C[ommittee of] P[ublic] S[afety] member

G. Ranvier

